

Chris Loder MP

Member of Parliament for West Dorset

Statement on Dominic Cummings

26th May 2020

Many constituents have written to me over the last few days; sharing their frustration, support or sadness and asking for my view on the current situation with Dominic Cummings.

I don't know him personally and we have never met. So, I have no affiliation, but I did want to get to the full facts; which is why I am making a considered response now and chose not to rush into making one before.

We have all been asked to make enormous sacrifices. Our response to this in West Dorset has contributed to the South West having one of the lowest numbers of Coronavirus cases in the country and for that I am very grateful.

Should Dominic Cummings have driven with his family to County Durham? In my opinion, no. However, his action has not broken any law (the statement from Dr Jenny Harries, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, on 24th March sets out the reasons why this is the case). Equally, I do not think that he should have driven to Barnard Castle on Easter Sunday, and I believe his decision to do so is much more questionable.

Not everything that was initially reported has transpired to be accurate and, in my opinion, these inaccuracies have played a part in fuelling a very angry public response. Some press stories have since been proven totally false, indeed even Durham Police gave an incorrect statement which was put right just before the press conference on Monday.

The real issue here is that the message to all of us, at that time, was to 'Stay at Home and Save Lives' - regardless. While we have made that sacrifice, often at great personal and emotional expense, the point has not nearly been well enough communicated that provision was always there, within the rules, for exceptional circumstances - especially where vulnerable people and young children are concerned.

Following on from the 'Kindness Matters' message I was promoting last week during Mental Health Awareness week, I want to also share with you my thoughts on bullying and intimidation.

Whatever our individual opinion of Dominic Cummings, is it right that he – or indeed anybody, public figure or not – should be targeted with threats of violence, even death, and be subjected to an orchestrated campaign of harassment towards their young family at their home? I don't especially warm to Mr Cummings but I have been asking myself how I would react if I was faced with a similar situation. It is, in my view, completely unacceptable to be on the receiving end of violent threats, which I do believe has played a part in this sorry state of affairs.

My role is to represent the views of my constituents; and I have indeed called the Government this morning to convey the strong, although not universal, views I have received. For me, the most important issue now is the moral responsibility of the Government to ensure that its guidance continues to be followed, for the protection of public health and the future of our communities – and it is this single point that I have asked Government to consider when it comes to Dominic Cummings' future.

My focus now, as it has been throughout, is to support local people, families and businesses of West Dorset through this crisis. Recovery is on the horizon, but so too is the probability of the worst recession for a very long time; so, finding a balance and working towards a safe recovery transition, must be our absolute priority.

ENDS

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